

Charities warn operation will affect most vulnerable

Fears for homeless in crackdown by police

HOMELESS charities have called for caution over a new police crackdown on rough sleepers in Camden.

Operation Encompass targeted homeless people and beggars last week with officers sent out on patrol with Camden Council and the UK Border Force officials.

Police said it had led to "several arrests and anti-social behaviour notices issued with a view to seeking Asbos in due course where appropriate".

But charities working with the homeless said Asbos and arrests would force vulnerable people out of the areas where mental health services know them well.

Others said that begging and homelessness should be treated as separate issues. They said begging should not be criminalised as benefit

by **PAVAN AMARA**

reforms meant some people were turning to "survival crime".

Duncan Shrubsole, who is the director of policy and external affairs at Crisis, warned that the police operation was "aggressively targeting and potentially criminalising some of the most vulnerable people in society",

cerned if police are targeting people who have literally no access to anything. The recession has really changed things. Before, people had something to fall back on, and now they don't. For some, their only income is now begging."

Ms O'Connor added that issuing Asbos "rarely" helps the situation, even if anti-social

stairwells or the canal bank in Camden Town. Those places are more dangerous for them, and they're harder for our outreach teams to access."

A spokesman for the charity Homeless Link added that if police "associated homelessness and begging it could perpetuate a misconception".

Alison Newcomb, the Metropolitan Police Service Commander who is leading the operation, said the police priority was "to ensure London's streets are safe".

She added: "We recognise that some people we engage with are vulnerable which is why we are encouraging them to access services to gain the support they need, while taking affirmative action against persistent offenders who break the law or cause intimidation to passing members of the public."

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adding: "We don't see how this is going to help anyone. What homeless people really need is access to services and support to help them get off the streets and to rebuild their lives."

Shelagh O'Connor, director of New Horizon Youth Centre, based in Chalton Street, Somers Town, said: "We are con-

behaviour is a problem.

"If you're from Camden, you know the agencies here. But then if you're moved away through arrest, or receive an Asbo and can't come back to the area, then you're left with no one again. If homeless people are taken off the streets, where they're visible to police, they will frequent

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